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AUTHOR Korth, Britta
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of multilingualism in the Kyrgyz educational system, noting how language learning and language attitudes are related. It analyzed language biographies (semi-narrative interviews in which informants discussed their lives as speakers of two or more languages) and observed language classes. Participants were bilingual college students. Results indicated that language learning and attitudes influenced each other in both directions. While language classes conveyed concepts about how useful language skills were, the skills taught were basically context-reduced (reading and reciting), and they did not lead to successful interaction in the target language. This led to frustration and decreased motivation. Immersion in Kyrgyzstan's Russian schools resulted in immersion shock for Kyrgyz speakers, who were still perceived as minority language speakers. This shock was less strong in urban areas, where communication in Russian occurred outside the school. Students came to school with the knowledge that Russian was the language of opportunities and that Kyrgyz enjoyed little prestige. For this reason and because language and ethnicity were perceived as almost synonymous, Russians put less effort into learning Kyrgyz. Consequently, the educational system put strong pressure on Russian language learners but hardly any on Kyrgyz language learners. (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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ANALYZING LANGUAGE BIOGRAPHIES – CONCEPTS OF LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Britta Korth, University of Basel

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1. INTRODUCTION

What makes a person a good language learner? Talent, a good teacher, a favourable attitude towards the language and its speech community, the right neighborhood? Or perhaps a combination of all of these factors?

This paper is part of a dissertation project which investigates the role of bilingualism in the Kyrgyz educational system. In particular, it aims to explain how language learning and language attitudes are related[i]. How do language attitudes influence language learning, and how are language attitudes towards Kyrgyz and Russian created in the language learning process both in and outside school in Kyrgyzstan?

In order to understand how speakers explain their own language competencies and language attitudes, I am analysing language biographies, and I am observing language classes. The term *Language Biography*[ii] refers to a semi-narrative interview, in which informants talk about their life as speakers of two or more languages. I will present two language biographies and analyse the most prototypical features in order to illustrate to which degree attitudes are an outcome or an input into Russian and Kyrgyz learning in Kyrgyzstan.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. INTERVIEW SETTING

The interview styles range between narrative and semi-structured, depending on how many topics the informants touched upon by themselves. The opening question "Can you tell me how you grew up with the languages that surround you?" or "How did it happen that you speak those languages?" usually elicited memories, which circled around certain topics (see 1.2.). The choice and order of topics was left to the interviewee, so that he/she decided what was relevant for an explanation of language acquisition processes in the Kyrgyzstani society. The topics which were left unmentioned, were only at the end of the interview brought to the informant's attention. Those topics are fixed in an interview guideline. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, but interviewees were given more time if desired.

There are certain "situational and cultural helpers" which help elicit information in a language biography:

- In a surrounding where the interviewer is a foreigner, he or she can pretend to know very little about language issues in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, the questions are taken as actual information questions and elicit elaborate explanations.
- Due to the relevance of languages in multilingual Kyrgyzstan and the experience of being dominated by a "colonial" language (Russian), people consider language issues important and enjoy talking about them.
- Every informant is an expert in her/his own language acquisition process, so she/he is the only person who is able to explain why and how she/he learnt (did not learn) them and which persons, incidents or strategies helped her/him.

All interviewees were multilingual. The interview language was Russian, even if it was not the interviewees dominant language. This allows me to relate attitudes towards Russian with the outcome of Russian language learning, namely Russian competence.

2.2. RECURRENT TOPICS

Although every person has his or her individual language biography, there are certain recurring topics which are considered collective experiences. Those are the topics which are most interesting for this research. These topics were identified in this research using a two-step methodology. First, by using the qualitative method of narrative interviews, the interviewees themselves were able to decide what they considered most relevant. In the second step, the researcher decided what she interpreted as relevant topics. In this quantitative analysis prototypical features are those that occur repetitively but not necessarily in the majority of interviews. A certain feature *A* is defined as prototypical if other speakers, who are asked to comment on it recognize a pattern which they find easy to place into their socio-cultural knowledge. Hence, interviewing is only one part of gathering information but observation is an obligatory complement for its meaningful interpretation.

In the two analysed interviews, recurrent topics are:

- **Choice of school as an explanation for different language competencies**
- Justification/ explanation of language competence and comparison with other speakers
- **More or less detailed description of the language learning process**
- **Evaluation of language teaching in school**
- Key persons in language acquisition and language maintenance

- Emotional relation towards the languages → **Language attitudes**
- Attitudes towards one's own and other ethnic groups
- Analysis of mistakes, linguistic weaknesses and strengths
- Opinion about official language planning efforts

All of the above mentioned topics ultimately give insights into speakers' explanations of their culture-specific language learning process. However, this paper will only focus on the topics in bold face because they directly illustrate the relationship between language attitude, language learning and the educational system.

2.3. INFORMANTS

INFORMANT 1:

I-1, a 24-year-old female student, grew up in an **urban** setting in southern Kyrgyzstan. She is a bilingual speaker of Russian and Kyrgyz, but considers Russian her dominant language: she thinks in Russian most of the time, uses it for writing, and prefers it for reading. Although she spoke only Kyrgyz until she was 5 ½, her Russian competencies increased during the six months she attended a Russian kindergarten[1] and in the following years that she attended a Russian school. This is where she acquired fluency and literacy in Russian. Her competence in Kyrgyz meanwhile decreased, but was refreshed and maintained at a good colloquial level during her relatives' visits and her vacations in her relatives' villages. After finishing school in the beginning of the 1990s she went to the capital (Bishkek) for vocational training, where she acted as an interpreter between the Kyrgyz and Russian monolinguals in her class. She returned to the south and now studies French at university. Although she received all her formal education in Russian, there she is registered in the Kyrgyz group, which is very exceptional. After having difficulties with "standard" Kyrgyz in the beginning, she now sees this as a chance to elaborate her Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz and Russian groups were later united into one Russian group, so that at the time the interview was taken (1999), she received her academic education in Russian.

[1] The Kyrgyz educational system is divided into Russian and Kyrgyz tracks. This, on the one hand, guarantees mother tongue education for Kyrgyz speakers; however, it has also led to segregation on the basis of language.

INFORMANT 2:

I-2, a 24-year-old male student, grew up in a **rural** setting in southern Kyrgyzstan. He is a Kyrgyz speaker who evaluates his Russian competencies as poor. Although he expresses himself quite fluently in Russian, he knows that he makes mistakes and says that he has difficulties in expressing his opinion. He attended a Russian school until his 5th school year. During his first year in Russian school he was allowed to speak Kyrgyz, as he remembers. From the second year on, however, his teachers were Russians and he had to speak Russian. From his 6th school year on, he was placed in a Kyrgyz school for reasons of underachievement. Kyrgyz schools are easier and the teachers are less strict, as he explains[2]. This is where his acquired Russian competencies began to decrease again. Due to this change of schools he became literate in both languages. After finishing school he began working in his village, where he speaks exclusively Kyrgyz. In the beginning of the 1990s he began studying in Bishkek, where he strongly experienced the disadvantage of not knowing good Russian, and where his competence in Russian improved. He returned to the south and now continues his studies in German philology in a Kyrgyz-speaking group of university.

The two informants are both from the southern region of Kyrgyzstan, which linguistically differs from the northern region[3]. They are the same age and have similar educational backgrounds (4th year; philology at university). They differ in respect to their degree of bilingualism, their dominant language, the language of schooling and their rural vs. urban origin. This illustrates the often mentioned and realistic connection between urban origin and Kyrgyz as a dominant language, which shall be pointed out in detail in the following section.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 CHOICE OF SCHOOL AS AN EXPLANATION FOR LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

Although different factors such as the languages spoken by relatives, neighbors and friends play an important role in acquiring Russian or Kyrgyz, the language of instruction is usually mentioned as **the** decisive factor.

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[2] This illustrates that the schools do not only differ in respect to language, but also in respect to the quality of teaching.

[3] The northern region is, as in many central Asian Republics more russified, due to its proximity to Russia and the location of the capital.

I-1 *в семье у нас говорили больше на русском,* ***потому что*** *мы ходили в русскую школу.*

We spoke more in Russian, ***because*** *we went to a Russian school.*

I-1 expresses a direct causal relation (*потому что, because)* between the choice of school and the language used at home. The same causal relation is expressed by I-2 in the beginning of the interview.

I-2: *не знаю могу объяснить*

I don't know if i can explain

ВК: *у тебя впечатление что ты плохо на русском говоришь?*

Do you have the impression that you speak bad Russian?

I-2: *Да*

Yes

ВК: *А почему?*

But why?

I-2: *Я же кыргыский школу закончил,* ***поэтому*** *не могу что-то хорошо объяснить или говорить.*

I graduated from a Kyrgyz school, **that is why** I cannot explain something very well or speak.

(Quote from the interview, grammatical mistakes are in the original.)

Although I-2 attended a Russian school in the first half of his elementary education, this is not referred to. It is left unsaid, how his poor Russian competence contributed to his academic underachievement. After the interview he explains, that he found it easier to follow the Kyrgyz education track because it is less demanding. Hence, on the one hand language of instruction is used to explain language competence, but on the other hand language competence in Russian facilitates and non-competence hinders academic achievement. This is summarized by I-1 in the following utterance:

I-1 *мне было легко,* ***потому что*** *я знала русский язык.*

It was easy for me, **because** I knew Russian.

This division leads to a two-class educational system with Russian as the dominant and superior language. This is explained in the next section.

3.2. LINGUISTIC SEGREGATION AND RUSSIAN SUPERIORITY

The Kyrgyz constitution guarantees individuals free choice of the language of instruction, as well as securing mother tongue education for the major ethnic groups[4]. In practice this means that Kyrgyz-speakers have the right to attend Russian language schools, but Russians do not make use of the right to educate their children in Kyrgyz.

However, in rare cases this right is violated for administrative reasons:

> **I-1**: *вообщем* ***хотя я не хотела****, считая что я киргикса и я смогу отправили меня в киргискую группу,* ***насильно****.*
>
> **Although I did not want to**, considering that I am Kyrgyz, **they made me** go to the Kyrgyz group,.

I-2 was educated in Russian, but due to a lack of Kyrgyz-speaking student she is put into the Kyrgyz university group. This decision was justified on the basis of her ethnic belonging *(считая что я киргикса/ considering that I am Kyrgyz)*, which is in many cases equated with language (see section 4.4.2.).

The Russian and Kyrgyz groups were later united and Russian became, without question, the language of instruction.

> **I-1**: *у нас мало осталось в кыргыской группе и нас объединили и я оказалось опять в русской группе.*
>
> There were little (students) left in the Kyrgyz group and they united us, and I ended up in a Russian group again.

In this case, the dominance of Russian may be explained by the fact that the Russian speakers outnumber the Kyrgyz speakers. However, the absence of any explanation rather illustrates that the speaker does not feel the need to either question or to explain the fact that Russian was chosen as the language of instruction. The dominance of Russian is implicitly accepted, even at a time (1999) when Russian was not yet de jure an official language, i.e. Kyrgyz was the only state language. The Russification of the two groups is, on the one hand, an indication that pragmatic solutions may be possible[5]; on the other hand, it also clearly illustrates how much the perception of Kyrgyz as a minority[6] language is internalized, implicitly accepted and, through measures like this, enhanced.

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[4] The majority of schools are Kyrgyz, followed by Russian, Uzbek and Tajik.

[5] The absence of Kyrgyz textbooks and specialized literature make teaching in Russian easier, and requires a knowledge of Russian even from the Kyrgyz educated students.

[6] Minority language does not refer to the number of speakers, but to the language's status in the society. A typical feature for a minority language in this sense is that its speakers feel social pressure to become bilingual, whereas majority-speakers only in rare cases become bilingual in the two languages.

In another passage the speaker explains how the linguistic and ethnic division of the group in her first years at a seamstress school in Bishkek is reflected physically.

I-1: *Группа сразу делилась, на первом ряду сидели русские, в принципе европейцы. Второй, третий ряд азиаты (...)*

The group devided itself immediately, in the first row there were the Russians, in principle Europeans. The second, third row Asian (...)

Although speakers are aware of Russian dominance, they defend the equality of the two speech groups in many communication events and arguments,. Nevertheless, they intuitively know that inequality exists.

I-1: *никакой разници между группами нет, не имеет значение, учимся на киргиском или на русском, просто у нас **так получается** что лекция у нас отдельно.*

There is not difference, it does not mean anything whether you are in the Kyrgyz or Russian speaking group. Lectures simply happen to be separate.

In the last example I-1 also confirms the belief that the division into groups based on language is almost "naturally given". It just happens this way (*просто у нас так получается/ they happen to be),* but one cannot call it discrimination, she continues later. This is an argument that is frequently made and which shows that this division, introduced during the Soviet Union, is considered necessary and that alternatives are almost unthinkable. In the course of her narration, however, I-1 comes to speak about division and segregation:

I-1: *Мы все общаемся, когда семинарские подготовишь, конечно это объединяет и **получается, что русские группы сами по себе и киргиские группы сами по себе.***

We all speak to eachother, of course when you write a seminar paper this unites, and then **it happens that Russians are amongst themselves and Kyrgyz amongst themselves.**

She then continues and acknowledges that there is not only a division, but also a disadvantage for Kyrgyz speakers. She takes up the topic of rural-urban division.

I-1: *Трудно на их месте. Приезжаешь с **провинции** там же нет ни одного русского, **русский плохо знаешь** только то, что проходил в школе, это обычно мало*

It is difficult for them. You come from the **province**, there is not a single Russian there, **you know Russian bad** only what you learn in school, and that is usually not a lot.

Although she never encountered severe language problems, she is aware of the disadvantages for Kyrgyz speakers.

Hence, there are two layers of discourse (and maybe even perception)[7]. One is the idea that difference is only discrimination if one group is disadvantaged on purpose and not as a a victim of circumstances. However, the Kyrgyzstani law guarantees equal rights for all linguistic groups. Thus there is no legal inequality based on language competence. This perspective has been strengthened after independence, when Kyrgyz became the state language and received legal status and more symbolic value. This status makes it even less plausible to think of Kyrgyz-speakers as disadvantaged and in a weaker position. The given linguistic division is perceived as a necessity; however, it is acknowledged that a lack of competence in Russian brings about many difficulties.

This division is not only perceived between university groups but also within one group. I-2 divides his group into good and bad Russian-speakers.

I-2: *у нас же национальная группа. (...) а из них четверо хорошо знают, **прекрасно знают (.) русский язык**. Из них пять, **пятеро не можем** а я в невтральном иногда могу говорить, иногда не могу, смешивается, вот я могу **когда я переведу половина на русском половина на кыргыском** вот четверо девушки всё на русском будет и остальные чытыре девушек на кыргыском (...), им тоже вообще трудно они тоже очень жалуется.*

We have the national group (....) and out of those **four know Russian well**, really really well (.). Five of them, **five, we cannot**, and I am in the middle, sometimes I can, sometimes I cannot. I get them mixed up. When I translate, **half is in Russian, half in Kyrgyz**. And there are four girls, all in Russian and the other four girls in Kyrgyz (...) . It is hard for them and they complain very much.

Even in the Kyrgyz group, students complain that not knowing Russian makes academic achievement harder (*они тоже очень жалуется/ they complain very much).* Between the groups, however the dividing line is even bigger:

I-2: *есть в нашем параллельном группе, у нас в европейской группе есть (...)*

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[7] If we rely on the theory that people talk about things they way they perceive them, then we can assume that discourse corresponds to perception. However, the relationship between perception and expression is not reliable. I assume that some speakers are perhaps aware of the idealized picture they present. The frequency with which discrimination is denied and division explained on grounds of necessity, however, suggests that speakers do NOT perceive division as segregation and inequality.

он русский. Я хочу с ним по-русский говорить ***но не знаю, почему не бывает,*** *когда я с ним говорил, они же все друзья и русские, я (.)* ***я стесняюсь.***

In our parallel group, there is, in the European group there is (...) he is Russian. I want to speak to him in Russian, but **I don't know, why it does not happen**, when I talk to him, they are all friends and Russian, I (.) **I feel ashamed.**

This Kyrgyz-speaker finds it very difficult to get into contact with his Russian-speaking peers. It just does not happen, he says, and he finds no explanation for this (*не знаю, почему не бывает/ I don't know why it does not happen*). This is a similar non-explanation as the *так получается* above, although he continues and gives a precise explanation, namely that the others are all Russian and he is ashamed *(они же все друзья и русские, я (.) я стесняюсь/ they are all friends and Russians, I (.) I feel ashamed*) of using his Russian, which has grammatical mistakes, as he explains further. He continues to explain that his efforts were laughed about and his pronunciation was commented on. Hence, the division is not explicitly perceived as segregation, yet the feeling of inferiority is implicitly expressed.

3.3.1. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LEARNING

Language acquisition can be spontaneous; i.e., speakers acquire L2 without conscious effort. They make their own generalizations which are not accessible for explication. This usually leads to good communicative competence. In contrast to acquisitions, we speak of language learning, when a speaker makes the deliberate attempt to learn a language through conscious application of rules and learnt vocabulary. The resulting competencies are not necessarily those which are needed in everyday spontaneous communication[iii]. Successful language learners combine both strategies. The conditions for learning Russian or Kyrgyz as L2 through this kind of combination are more or less favourable in Kyrgyzstan depending on the age and rural or urban background of the learner.

3.3.1. SPONTANEOUS LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

In both interviews we find both detailed description of the speakers' strategies to learn one of the languages, and very simple explanations. One of the simplest explanations is:

Мы постепенно постепенно привыкли.

We got used to it by and by (literal translation)

The literal formulation *постепенно привык(ла,ли)* is found not only in those two interviews, but can be considered as the prototypical formulation to explain language acquisition as opposed to conscious learning. The English equivalent would be *to pick up a language*.

The necessity and the surrounding is stressed, when explaining Russian language acquisition. The two speakers also mention more explicit strategies, including:

- comparing the two languages and finding regularities and similarities,
- reading books and papers with the help of a dictionary, even if the contents are not understood,
- watching TV and trying to imitate some of the expressions,
- looking up endings in grammar books,
- asking friends for unknown words.

These are all out-of-class activities; in school speakers *pick up the language* by being taught in it (immersion), or by taking language classes.

3.3.2. IMMERSION

Immersion in the Russian language is a very common strategy to "teach" Russian to Kyrgyz-speaking children. Kyrgyz-speaking parents deliberately send their children to Russian schools, so that their children become educated in the "language of opportunities". Depending on the existing level of knowledge of Kyrgyz and the teacher's methodology, this is a more or less painful shock to very many Kyrgyz-speaking schoolchildren and students.

> **I-2:** *На русском было трудно, там тоже учительница была ..... она с часто говорит, чтобы изучать надо говорить, сейчас все на русском говорят в кыргыстане. Вот объязательно научится кыргыский эээ русский язык. всё на* ***русском переводи****, она тоже не смогла хорошо на кыргыском и всегда когда была* ***беседа*** *всё на русском было. Конечно трудно было, я когда только* ***читать не мог даже обратно перерассказывать.***
>
> It was difficult in Russian, there was a teacher (…) she said often, that we should speak in order to learn. Now everybody speaks Russian in Kyrgyzstan. We had to learn Kyrgyz ehm Russian. **Translate** everything into Russian! She could not in Kyrgyz either, and whenever we talked to her every thing was in Russian. Of course it was difficult, **I could not read then, not even retell.**

His teachers do not understand Kyrgyz, so that it is impossible for him to make himself understood. In immersion classes, however, it is recommended to have teachers who at least understand the students' L1. Letting students reply in their L1 leads to better results, because students feel that their language is appreciated[iv]. The pressure and frustration in the Russian schools lead to ambivalent attitudes toward Kyrgyz (which is felt to be worthless) and towards Russian (which is perceived as frustrating and threatening).

I-1 is a rare example of successful immersion of a majority-language speaker into minority-language classes[8]. As explained above, it is usually Kyrgyz-speakers who aspire to learn Russian, rather than vice versa, so that her Kyrgyz immersion experience is exceptional. She speaks Kyrgyz fairly well, but experiences terminological problems in the all Kyrgyz groups that she attends:

> **I-1:** *...не могла понять* ***термины,*** *я думала, ну ладно я не поняла слово, я дальше пойму. (...) вот* ***они мне объяснили*** *и* ***потом я только поняла весь смысл лекции*** *из-за одного слова я не могла понять.*
>
> I could not understand the **terminology**, and i thought, well, i don't understand the word, i will understand later on (...) and **they explained to me** and then only I understood the sense of the whole lecture, because of one word I could not understand

I-2 struggles a lot more, not only with one or two words, but with whole expressions and communication. He also experiences the social stigma that goes along with not knowing good Russian. This stigma is not attached to knowing "only" colloquial Kyrgyz. On the contrary, I-1's classmates express their admiration for her good Russian knowledge:

> **I-1**: (quotes her classmates) *"ооо как ты хорошо знаешь русский язык"*
>
> *„Oh, how well you speak Russian"*

This is something an ethnic Kyrgyz Kyrgyz-speaker never experiences, since it is taken for granted (although not realistic) that ethnic Kyrgyz speak Kyrgyz (cp. section 4.3.2.).

3.3.3. LANGUAGE TEACHING

The interviewees' references to activities in language classes are very one-sided. Informants only talk about READING, RETELLING and LEARNING BY HEART; there is

[8]The Canadian and US Experience has shown that bilingual immersion leaves negative psychological effects and hence an unfavourable language attitude on minority-language speakers. Immersing majority-language speakers into the minority-language, however, has left positive linguistic and attitudinal results.

absolutely no mention of other language teaching/learning activities. This picture very much corresponds to the actual teaching style in classrooms.

> **I-2**: *Я мог* ***читать*** *но не смог* ***пере (.) просто (.) рассказывать*** *обратно.*
> I could read, but could not re- (.) simply tell something again.

He remembers that he could not retell texts, so that he once learnt a text by heart, cited the text and impressed his classmates as well as the teacher.

The interviewee describes the classes as boring (*не интересно было).* Classmates laugh about mistakes, which influences the attitude towards the taught language (*и все насмешивают его, и поэтому никто даже читать не хочет):*

> **I-2:** ***не интересно было,*** *вот в кыргыской школе есть девчонки, мальчики которые лучше учатся, даже они, например* ***когда читают что литературу в слух читают а они не могут хорошо говорить, произношение у них плохо было [+++] читают и все насмешивают его, и поэтому никто даже читать не хочет во время урока.***
> It was not interesting, in the Kyrgyz school there were girls, boys who knew better, even they, for example **when they read literature aloud, and they could not speak well, their pronunciation was bad [+++], they read and everybody laughs about him, and this is why noone would even want to read during class.**

Attention is paid to pronunciation and reading skills. This is in many cases called *speaking Russian*. In the following paragraph, I-1 illustrates how *speaking* or *knowing a language* is equated to *knowing texts by heart*.

> ***I-1:*** *моя однокурсница, она понимала хотя* ***плохо разговаривала****. Она стала рассказывать стих Пушкина. (....) я просто удивилась что она* ***наизусть*** *(...)*
> My classmate, she understood, but spoke poor Russian. She started citing a poem by Pushkin (...). I was simply amazed, that she (...) **by heart.**

Reciting a poem contradicts her belief that her classmate does not *speak* Russian. Moreover, Pushkin's poems are considered to be difficult and very elaborate literature, so that for her it is difficult to believe that a person who even cites Pushkin has few speaking skills. The connection between the aim of speaking a language and knowing poems by heart as a means of teaching it, is illustrated when I-1's continues.

I-1: *если бы нам преподавали в школе киргизский язык, мы тоже бы стали с детства* ***разговаривать****, нам бы тоже было легко,* ***я не против декламировать стихи.***

If they had taught us Kyrgyz in school, we would speak from childhood on, it would be easy for us as well, **I have nothing against citing poems**.

In neither interview is there any reference at all to interactive and comprehension skills in language classes. Nevertheless, I-2 knows exactly that he his lacking communication skills outside class. Hence it is intuitively clear what it means to speak a language, but those skills are neither valued nor trained in language classes, which makes learning difficult and frustrating.

3.4. LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Some attitudinal features have been expressed both directly and indirectly through the evaluation of language classes. They are frequently connected to attitudes toward the ethnic group. The differences between the rural Kyrgyz and the urban bilingual speaker are again significant.

3.4.1. TOWARDS MULTILINGUALISM

The bilingual speaker from the urban area has little negative experience or negative attitudes towards either of the languages. She sees Russian as the language that unifies people in Kyrgyzstan and the CIS; however, she acknowledges that the future of Kyrgyzstan is bilingual, and that Kyrgyz will play an important role on the national level. Her attitude towards bi- and multilingualism is thus very positive. Her case illustrates that under the right circumstances immersion and bilingual education enable the speaker to become not only bilingual, but also bi-literate and bicultural. She considers herself a member of both the Kyrgyz and the Russian speech-communities because she thinks in the two languages.

I-2 theoretically also values multilingualism. But his Russian acquisition was not very successful, in comparison to other Kyrgyz Russian speakers. The immersion into Russian classes at a young age, without consideration of important psychological factors, has created an ambivalent attitude towards multilingualism, and particularly Russian.

In addition, outside the educational system, he knows that his knowledge of Uzbek is valued by the Uzbek,

I-2: (quotes) *«ооо молодец, ты уже, ты можешь говорить оказывается» (usbekisch)*

"Oh good, you alreaday seem to know (Uzbek)."

but frowned upon by Kyrgyz (*почему ну говори на кыргыском*). Although he tries to speak to every person in his or her language, he has an ambivalent attitude toward multilingualism (*Мне очень так хочется, но у меня не получается)*, because he knows that many members of his speech-community consider multilingualism a threat to their ethnic and linguistic identity. This threat is felt especially strong from Uzbek and Russian, the major languages in Kyrgyzstan.

I-2: ***многие кыргызы не хотят, почему, ну говори на кыргыском****, почему, я хочу немцами на немецком хочу говорить, на русском русскими, а кыргызам киргиский и узбекам на узбецком. Мне очень так хочется, но у меня не получается.*

Many Kyrgyz do not want, why, well, speak in Kyrgyz, why, I want to speak to Germans in German, to Russians in Russian, and to Kyrgyz in Kyrgyz and to Uzbek in Uzbek. I want this very much, but it does not happen to me like this.

3.4.2. TOWARDS RUSSIAN

As mentioned above, knowledge of Russian is very prestigious, but for many Kyrgyz speakers it also presents a threat to their ethnic identity.

I-1: *пожилые люди, которые* ***с упрёком****, что* ***вы киргизы и не разговариваете на киргиском.***

Old people, who **accuse** (us), **you are Kyrgyz and don't speak in Kyrgyz.**

I-2 remembers that he did not mind speaking Russian to the Russians in Bishkek, but that he found it very difficult to speak Russian to ethnic Kyrgyz and that he did not like it. He may feel inferior, when he compares his bad Russian to their good Russian, whereas Russian knowledge for Russians is "natural". This reflects the very common belief, that *a person should speak one's own language. Она свой язык даже не знает (she does not speak her own language)* is a very common accusation to Russian speaking ethnic Kyrgyz. Ethnicity and language are equated and *родной язык (native tongue)* thus refers to a person's ethnicity and not to their first language.

I-2's experiences with Russian at school are exclusively negative. His experience illustrates that even though he knows Russian, he is still stigmatised as a Kyrgyz-speaker, as

long as his pronunciation is not perfect, and as long as he speaks with grammatical mistakes. He tries to get around Russian by learning a foreign language, which is also highly prestigious.

> **I-2:** *но никто не старался русский язык узнать, никто не знал и никто тогда не любил русский язык. (...) мое мнение лучше чем (.)этого,(.) немецкий лучше чем русского (...). я так думаю. Вот поэтому не стараюсь, чтобы знать хорошо. Немецкий хочу знать.*
>
> Noone tries to know Russian, noone knew it, and noone at that time loved Russian (...). In my opinion better than (.) well (.), Russian is (.). German is better than Russian, I think so. And this is why I don't put effort into knowing it. I want to know German.

3.4.3. TOWARDS KYRGYZ

Both speakers are L1 Kyrgyz speakers. There are, however, hardly any quotes that indicate their emotions and attitudes towards Kyrgyz. The problem of translating "serious" literature into Kyrgyz and of expressing difficult thoughts in it is mentioned by I-1:

> **I-1** *серёзные вещи перевести трудно.*
>
> It is difficult to translate serious things.

This refers to the lack of scientific terminology, but it also conveys the idea that Kyrgyz is a language for everyday communication, for the home and the bazaar, but not for literature or science. This is one of the reasons why Kyrgyz speakers consider Russian and Uzbek, which have longer literary traditions, as threats to Kyrgyz linguistic vitality.

Since it is very uncommon for Russian-speakers to even try to learn Kyrgyz, they are praised for knowing three Kyrgyz phrases, counting to ten and singing one song in Kyrgyz, which again reflects the concept that *knowing a language* means uttering highly context reduced linguistic items.

4. CONCLUSION

The two interviews illustrate[9] that language learning and language attitudes influence each other in both directions. On the one hand, language classes convey concepts about what

[9] The expressed opinions and attitudes are individual, but they also refer to collective experiences.

useful language skills are. Since the taught skills amount to no more than context-reduced skills such as reading and reciting, they do not lead to successful interaction in the target language. This in turn leads to frustration and a decrease in motivation.

Immersion as practiced in Russian schools in Kyrgyzstan results in an immersion shock for the Kyrgyz-speaker, who in spite of the legal status of the language are still perceived as speakers of a minority language. This shock is particularly strong in rural areas, where no communication in Russian is possible and the students do not understand the necessity of learning it, and are thus not motivated but pressured to do so. The pressure and frustration they experience in their first years of school may lead to an unfavorable attitude towards Russian. This is in some cases also connected to academic underachievement, so that not knowing Russian has a double negative effect. In urban areas, where learning in class is combined with communication in Russian outside school, conditions for language learning and acquisition are rather favorable and leave more favorable attitudes.

Due to the general acceptance of Russian as the "superior" language, the division into Kyrgyz and Russian educational tracks increases segregatory effects instead of increasing the value of Kyrgyz. Language attitudes are thus an outcome of language teaching and education in so far that concepts about *speaking a second language* and experiences of superiority or underachievement connected to knowing or not knowing a language are created in the educational system.

Nevertheless, learners come to school with the knowledge that Russian is the "language of opportunities," and that Kyrgyz enjoys little prestige. For this reason and because language and ethnicity are perceived as almost synonymous, Russians put less effort into learning Kyrgyz. Consequently, the educational system puts strong pressure on Russian language learners, but hardly any on Kyrgyz language learners. Thus attitudes are an input into language teaching and learning; however, they are confirmed and fermented through the educational process.

Reasonable language planning measures could break this interdependence or vicious circle, which leads to ethno-linguistic segregation. Policy makers are however also subject to their experience and attitudes, hence alternatives to linguistic division and learning texts by heart are so far hardly thinkable.

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[i] Baker, C. (1992); Pulvermüller, F.; Schumann, J. H. (1994); Bradac; J. J. (1990), Gardner, R. C.; Lambert, W. E. (1972)

[ii] Franceschini, R. (1999); Fix, U; Barth (2000)

[iii] Wode, H. (1995, 137)

[iv] Crawford, J. (1989); Wode, H. (1995); Krashen, S. (1999)

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